

To: Members of the Council, City of Seattle

From: The Washington State Psychological Association

July 26, 2016

RE: An ordinance related to human rights, prohibiting the practice of conversion therapies to
Minors in the City of Seattle

Dear Members of the Seattle City Council:

The Washington State Psychological Association (WSPA) represents over 500 Washington State psychologists engaged in research, teaching and practice of psychological theory and systems of practice. We enthusiastically support your intention to prohibit the practice of conversion or “sexual orientation change” therapies to minors in the City of Seattle.

Both WSPA and the American Psychological Association (APA) oppose the practice of these therapies, as do all major mental health and other health organizations in this country. Conversion therapies are based on the notion that same sex attraction is inferior to heterosexual attraction, dysfunctional, or just plain wrong, and that lesbian and gay individuals are incapable of leading productive lives or engage in stable family relationships. It has been the policy for many years of both WSPA and APA that same sex attraction, love, families, feelings and behaviors are normal aspects of human sexuality.

However, WSPA’s members continue to treat patients who are suffering from the results of conversion therapy they were subjected to as minors. Our colleague Dr. Douglas Haldeman, a nationally recognized expert in this field, has testified before the Washington State Legislature (2013), assisted in the drafting and passage of the landmark State of California prohibition of conversion therapies, and has over 30 years of experience in research and clinical practice regarding conversion therapies. Here are some excerpts from his testimony before the Washington State Legislature in 2013:

“Conversion therapies purport to change homosexual orientation through attempts to recondition behavior, or develop insights into how certain family dynamics “cause” homosexuality. No scientific justification exists for the theory that parenting styles or parental personality characteristics have any effect on a child’s eventual sexual orientation.”

“Conversion therapies can be particularly dangerous for adolescents because of the vulnerability of developing brain structures during this time of life. Though the residual effects of conversion therapies in adulthood can be variable, such individuals often experience chronic depression, anxiety, guilt and shame associated with their inability to change their homosexual orientation.”

“In 30 years, I have never seen anyone for whom (these therapies) worked.”

Despite the Supreme Court's decision in 2015 that LGBTQ individuals have the right to marry, and notwithstanding increasing public acceptance of same sex relationships, ongoing devaluation of same sex relationships still makes conversion therapies a realistic option for some parents. It is not. With this ordinance, you make clear to all residents of the City of Seattle that these therapies are dangerous, lack any clinical or scientific justification and pose a significant public health risk in our City.

Thank you very much.

Lucy A. Homans, Ed.D.

Licensed psychologist & Director of Professional Affairs for WSPA, on behalf of the members of the

Washington State Psychological Association